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U.S. drafting strategy to aid bid to ax Khadafy

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Washington (News Bureau)—The Reagan administration is drafting a secret strategy to use Egypt and other moderate Arab states to topple the regime of Libyan strongman Moammar Khadafy, the Daily News learned yesterday.

Top United States officials have begun describing Khadafy as a "cancer that has to be cut out," according to one confidential source. But the effort to neutralize him, a senior State-Department official insisted, would not take the form of assassination.

Rather, the U.S. would encourage conservative Arab states that feel threatened by Khadafy, most notably Egypt, to take action of their own, either through direct invasion or sponsorship of a coup. If the Arab attempt appeared to be near failure, the U.S. would provide direct assistance, one official indicated.

Even though assassination is ruled out, the willingness to move against Khadafy signifies a return to practices of the 1950s and 1960s, when the U.S. either directly or indirectly, intervened to alter the leadership of Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, South Vietnam and the Congo. In

1973, the U.S. was widely suspected of being behind the Chilean army's successful putsch against Marxist President Salvador Allende.

THE OPERATION AGAINST Khadafy would be done in such a way that the U.S. would be able to claim that it was not directly involved. But senior administration officials are saying privately that the U.S. would give direct assistance to the Arab states to make sure that it succeeds.

The mercurial, 38-year-old Khadafy is a particular source of anger and concern for Secretary of State Haig. "Haig regards Khadafy, like Castro, as essentially inimical to our national interest," a senior official said.

But while Haig has drawn the line at attempting another invasion of Cuba, the administration is willing to assist Khadafy's opponents in the Arab world to topple the Libyan leader.

Egypt's President Anwar Sadat has been the most outspoken enemy of Khadafy, but in recent months Egypt has been joined by Saudi Arabia and the Sudan in its opposition to Libya. Egyptian forces were recently reported to be maneuvering on the Libyan border, where major fighting broke out in 1977.

The U.S. justifies its current, multibillion-dollar arms

program to Egypt—\$900 million in arms sales this year alone, with deliveries of F-16 jet fighters and M-60 tanks in the works—on the ground of Khadafy's threat to Sadat.

LAST WEEK, THE LAST remaining 27 Libyan diplomats in the U.S. left Washington at the State Department's order. Executives from about 50 U.S. firms were advised to withdraw as many of their 2,000 American employees in Libya as possible.

In previous administrations, the Central Intelligence Agency plotted to kill Fidel Castro and Congolese leftist Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. It also played an indirect role in the assassinations of Dominican President Rafael Trujillo, South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and Chilean army general Rene Schneider, according to a 1975 report by the Senate Intelligence Committee. In 1973, allegedly with CIA assistance, the Chilean army deposed Marxist President

Salvador Allende, who reportedly committed suicide while under siege.

But a senior administration official said President Reagan would never authorize a political assassination, even though the CIA's cover-action capacities are currently being restored.

Khadafy has been accused by the U.S. of supporting international terrorists, including the notorious "Carlos", of murdering political opponents throughout the world; of threatening Egypt and the Sudan; invading Chad; financing Pakistani and Iraqi efforts to build nuclear weapons; and providing the Soviet Union with a dangerous "proxy force" in the Middle East.

THE 45,000-MAN Libyan army has been armed by the Soviet Union since 1973, and about 2,000 Soviet military advisers are in Libya. Khadafy's arsenal is estimated at \$12 billion, and includes the latest T-72 Soviet tanks and Mig aircraft.

At the same time, Libya has provided the U.S. with about 10% of its total oil imports. Khadafy has used the revenues he receives from the U.S. to buy Soviet weapons, but he insists that he is not a stooge of the Soviet Union and wants to be friends with the U.S.